1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

794 755 In the zar cult, there is no attempt to win the love of the spirit, or to love him or her in turn; rather it is a game of cajoling, tricking, bribing the patient out of the condition of total submission into one of partial control; and then forever renting one's mortgaged mental health through permanent financial payments. But there is the added recompense of gaining an invisible protector, who, as financial partner, has a permanent interest in the success of the partnership; plus the recompense of the human fellowship.

794 773 776 According to the mythology of the "zar"cult, the "zar" spirits originated in the Biblical Garden of Eden at the same time man was created. They assumed physical form when Eve began to bear children. Eve is believed to have had 30 children. One day, when God the Creator came to visit, and began to count the children, Eve (evidently fearing the evil eye), hid the 15 most beautiful ones. God, being all-knowing, realized this, and became angry. As punishment, He decreed that the 15 hidden children always remain hidden, invisible, night creatures, for all eternity. The present-day zar spirits are believed descended from them. The "zar" spirits are more powerful and more beautiful than man, know remedies for all ailments, but envy their uglier and weaker human brothers and sisters who are "daytime" children of the light. Some "zar" spirits have thus become malevolent, though many can be cajoled and bribed into "forgiveness" (a word much used in the cult ceremony). Others are inclined to be benevolent, and, if their pity is touched, may reveal secret remedies, in dreams or during possession, e.g. to a mother for her sick child.

795 Some dabtära have grown wealthy through mass-production of
756 amulets, in which they leave the name of the client free, to be
556 filled in on the market when sold. But this "waters down" his reputation.

b. The cosmology of demons treated by amulets

789 The amulets written by the dabtara are worn, usually on the "matab" neckcord, or around the waist especially of women. They are not read. To be effective they must bear the inscribed name of the wearer, though it is possible to have a dabtara erase the name and substitute another. Usually the amulet is written on varying qualities of parchment (from very thick to very fine), rolled tightly into a small leather case. The ink used is usually [384] made of soot, charcoal, iron powder and gallus. To emphasize an important name or matter, imported red ink is used.

Amulets also may contain drawn pictures, symbols and geometric design, some of a type that has been called "cabalistic". A fre- [716] quent picture is the scene depicting the killing of the female demon of miscarriage, "Werzelya", by Saint Susneos, seated on a horse using a lance (much like European scenes of St. George killing the dragon). This demon is sometimes depicted as a female [567] of the negroid (Barya) tribe, from which the Amhara used to capture slaves. The legend that accompanies this scene is as follows:

●773 A Christian martyr, named Susneyos, had married and his child
789 had been killed by the female demon Werzelya. Thereupon he prayed to Jesus and received special power to slay the murderess. St. Susneyos mounted his horse, took his spear and rode away to the desert (evidently the Nilotic lowland below the northwestern escarpment), where the demon was hiding with others of her kind.

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

773 On the way he found an old witch. Interrogating her, St. Susnayos
789 learned that Worsalya had gone into a garden. Finally, he found the demon sitting under a tree. He speared and mortally wounded her. Before expiring she promised never to afflict anyone who carried the inscribed name of Saint Susnayos.

The effectiveness of the amulet lies therefore in reminding the female demon of her promise to Susnayos.

789 Other common designs include angels with fiery swords (sometimes seen also incised upon wooden church doors); the cross over sun and moon; and the evil eye, sometimes oval, sometimes in profile, but often round with a red iris (symbolising the magic drinking of blood).

A typical formula against the demon of epilepsy, "barya", reads as follows:

> "You (actually "he", polite), Barya, who steals the heart of man (i.e. renders insane),
> who darkens the eye,
> who comes as shadow by nighttime,
> I put a spell on you, and curse you by ...(name of saint or angel)."

776 There are three common categories in the cosmology of demon
753 diseases treated by amulets:
755

(1) General evil-eye disease, referred to generically as "buda" - particularly in cases of puzzling functional and mental ailments - or identified and diagnosed by the name of a demon - particularly in fevers and paralysis.

(2) The demons of epilepsy, "Barya".

(3) Gynecological ailments, ascribed to specific female demons.

Amulets are collectively referred to as "ketab" (lit. writings, in Geez).

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

[MANZ]

estates" make up the most common subjects of litigation in Manz, and hardly a day passes in the courts there without a hearing on some case about *rist*.

The Manzēs are as stubbornly loyal to their fathers' faith as they are to their land. They take much pride in the strictness with which the Orthodox fasts are observed in Manz, and in the fact that non-Christians are not to be found there. A number of legends told locally represent Manz as an especially hallowed Christian territory. One legend says that after the Crucifixion the angel Uriel gathered some of Jesus' blood on his wings and flew to Manz. Standing on the hill of Dabra Qopros in Māmā Meder, he shook his wings and thereby sprinkled the holy blood over the entire area. Another story dates the sanctification of Manz by the blood of Jesus to the time when a portion of the true Cross was brought to Ethiopia and tells of how on the way to its repository at Gishēn Māryām, in Wallo, some drops spilled from the relic onto Manz soil.[87] Still another legend relates that the Virgin Mary sojourned in Manz when Jesus was a young boy. Lake Alo Bāhr in western Gērā Meder is said to be the product of Mary's wrath—her punishment of the people who lived on what was dry land at the time for judging against her in a dispute with a local woman.

To defend his land, church, or honor, the typical Manzē is ready at short notice to fight to the death. In their own eyes, as in the eyes of others, the men of Manz are reputed for hardiness and combativeness. *Mot ged yallam* ("Never mind about death!") is the motto one governor from Manz volunteered as the key to the ethos of his people. The Manzē wants his son to be *guabaz* ("brave") and uses this term, like that of *waṭādar* ("soldier"), as a favorite compliment. The names which are characteristically given to children in Manz express this determination:

Ahidē	"Thrasher"	*Gothemē*	"Shover"
Aṭdangaṭ	"Frighten"	*Laṭybalu*	"Let Them Bow"
Aṭāmantā	"Don't Hesitate"	*Mān Yāzhāl*	"Who Orders You?"
Balātchaw	"Give It To Them"	*Nādaw*	"Wipe Him Out"
Balāy-metā	"Hit On The Top"	*Ṭālārgē*	"Powerful"
Chabudē	"Squeezer"	*Tāsaw*	"Smash Him"
Ċhaċheſē	"Hacker"	*Weqātchaw*	"Thrash Them"

Female names in Manz sometimes reflect this virile emphasis; for example, *Hijibātchaw* ("Go Against Them") or *Asugadatch* ("She Makes Them Bow").

A common symbol of physical bravery is the *dulā*, a hardwood staff about three feet long. The Manzē is rarely seen without his *dulā*. It has many purposes—to brace his shoulders on long treks, to carry loads, to ward off dogs when he goes visiting, to support his body while listening to litigation or standing at the long church services.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

heaven, *samāy*, the abode of supernatural beings and the souls of the dead. The earth is seen as flat, though some believe its shape to be square, others think it is round like a disc, and still others imagine it to extend without limit. That the terrain of Ethiopia is so obviously not flat is explained by reference to the great flood, after which the parts which dried quickly became highlands (*dēgā*), the parts slow to dry becoming lowlands (*qolā*). The peasant explains the greater heat of the lowlands by saying that they receive less wind than the highlands.

Beneath the earth's surface is an obscure area called *maq*, a depth to which the bodies of evildoers drop after burial. There is also a large subterranean ocean, *weqniyānos*, into which all the rivers and lakes on earth descend. The earth itself is held up, according to some, by a Y-shaped piece of wood; according to others, by two serpents; still another view is that no support is needed other than the will of God, as the saying indicates:

> Ay, My God! Lord who stretched forth the heavens without a pillar, and the earth without tent-pegs.

The rotation of the sun *above* the earth causes the alternation of night and day. The imagery of this rotation is that of someone going home at night and coming out in the morning. Attitudes toward the sun are quite ambivalent. The sun is appreciated for dispersing the morning chill and for causing seed to germinate, but it is feared as a source of sickness and death.*

The moon is highly regarded, which is probably a vestige of pre-Christian moon worship. At the Ethiopian latitude the moon is functional, for its bright illumination facilitates night travel, especially desirable in the hotter regions. Beyond this, the moon is considered a powerful agent. It is chief of the sky, commander of an army of stars and it is the force which causes crops to grow after the sun has brought forth seedlings.

In the heavenly realm there are two regions located on either side of God's dwelling-place. To the right is an area where good souls repair for an eternity of ease after being judged shortly after the death of their bodies. Known both as the "kingdom of heaven" and "paradise"—terms which refer to quite different spheres in the Orthodox cosmology but are fused in the vulgar mind—it is regarded as a home where food and clothes are plentiful and freely distributed. To the left is the place where wicked souls are taken by the devil to be scorched eternally in the fire of Gehenna, also called *Sī'ol* (again a fusion of concepts which are distinct for the learned). This treatment of the damned is made worse by alternate dippings in icy water, though some believe that the wicked souls get a respite from their tortures on weekends.

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* The TAT's revealed a great dread of the sun; nearly every respondent interpreted one or another of the cards in terms of the sun's dangerousness.

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As for the beginning and end of the world, all Amhara believe that the world was created at one time by the will of God. When the eighth millennium arrives, moreover (A.D. 2508), God will bring about a major upheaval, either destroying the world completely or, as others believe, turning it upside down. According to the latter view, all those who live at that time will perish, while those who died first in the world's history will return to life, to a time of renewal, when a little grain will go a long way and the milk of one cow will nourish a multitude.

The Amhara peasant's view of nature is matter-of-fact. There are a few traces of animism, such as the association of certain kinds of trees with holy places and the belief that whatever is planted on the monthly commemoration of Christ's birth will dry up and die. There are a few touches of aesthetic appreciation, such as the peasant's wonderment over a remarkable view when it is thrust upon him and his desire, when feasible, to locate his home in an attractive locale. But there is certainly no idealization, religious or secular, of the great outdoors. The peasant much prefers to get out of the bright sunshine and rest in the dark, smoky interior of his hut. When he sits gazing over the hills and slopes of his gorgeous country, he is probably counting his livestock or noticing how the grain is growing.*

The Amhara peasant's life is so much a part of nature that he does not view it as a separate category of experience; there is no word for "nature" in his vocabulary. Nor is there a sense that the things of nature have minds or laws of their own. Nature is simply the passive agent of God's rewards and punishments; for example, the man who fails to keep the Orthodox fasts will find that his crops are ruined.

For his part, the peasant's adjustment to nature is a straightforward practical one. He has no drive to conquer or to be master over nature; he has no inclination to fuse or lose himself in nature; he has no need to keep nature in equilibrium through a system of rituals. His perception of natural objects is in terms of what will assist or hinder eking out a subsistence. The farm animals are his friends, and must be taken care of properly or else they will die and he will be without their help. The wild beasts are his enemies, and they must be guarded against or else they will eat his crops, his livestock, or himself. The fields must be plowed at the right time each year or the bins will become empty, and knowing the right time depends upon a sufficient knowledge of weather to judge the coming of the various kinds of rain.

Thus, the motif in the Amhara peasant's orientation toward nature is to get what one can out of what nature readily provides, neither neglecting one's responsibilities to keep things running as nature requires, nor inflicting any

* All the TAT respondents interpreted card No. 4, showing two men sitting on a ridge overlooking a natural panorama, in terms of taking care of the grazing animals and becoming wealthy.

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ber of Amhara folk tales, moreover, have as their central theme the resolution of conflict or the attainment of mastery over the environment by means of eating something or presenting food to someone.[16] It is a theme conspicuous in the legend which celebrates the ascendance of the first of the Shoan Amhara emperors, Yekuno Amlāk (1270-85). According to *The Book of the Riches of Kings,* Yekuno Amlāk ate by chance the head of a rooster which had been set out for a king of the rival Zāgwē Dynasty:

> And this youth Yakuno Amlak found the head of the cock which the woman had left by the fire-place, and he took it and ate it, and it filled his belly, and it made him an exalted person and so mighty a man that he was superior to every other man of might, and it made his face to shine like the light of the sun, and his majesty filled all the other servants of the king with awe, and all the people feared him, and they marvelled at him, and they loved him exceedingly, and they placed him in their hearts, and they recognized that the grace of God was upon him, and they said, "What is the thing which hath come upon this young man?"[18]

Oral Sadism

In addition to subserving a passive, receptive mode of relating to the environment, preoccupation with the oral zone also figures in Amhara culture as the locus of a variety of aggressive modes of behavior and fantasy. Hostility is expressed by a number of oral gestures. Sticking out the tongue and spitting on the ground in front of somebody, for example, are two forms of non-verbal insult. Biting the lower lip is an indication of anger. Touching the tongue, and then forehead, chin, and cheeks, signifies "You just wait!" When fighting, men sometimes bite one another's ears. The activation of a strong biting impulse in situations of military combat is suggested by the following refrain from an Amhara martial declaration, recorded over a century ago:

> Oh brothers, you are hungry and thirsty! Oh true sons of my mother,
> Are you not birds of prey? Come on! There is the enemy's flesh.
> And I, I will be the rider to butcher for you! Forward,
> And if you lack hydromel, I will give you my blood to drink.[19]

The theme of cannibalism appears in various forms in the Amhara imagination. One of the common subjects of traditional Amhara painting is the story of the cannibal Balaya Sab. His name is in Ge'ez, and means "Eater of Men." The story about him derives from one of the old legends collected in *The Miracles of the Blessed Virgin Mary.*[17] Balaya Sab was a wicked man who fed on the flesh of humans. At his death he appeared before St. George, who measured his evil deeds against his good deeds on a large scale. On the side of evil deeds were placed the souls of all those he had eaten, so heavy a weight that the devil began to make ready to carry him off to hell. Then

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Mary intervened, placing on the empty side for good deeds a goblet of water which Balaya Sab had once given to a sick beggar out of pity; and the Eater of Men was saved. In the pictorial representation of this legend, Balaya Sab is portrayed cutting off pieces of human flesh with a curved knife in the manner in which raw beef is attacked at the Amhara table.

Most Amhara know some sort of tale about a cannibal. The topic is familiar enough that they are able to invent new ones. One boy told me he made up the following story to explain the nature of cannibals to his younger brother:

> Once there was a cannibal. He lived among many people. He had no food in his house; he was poor. But even if he had not been poor, he just liked to eat the flesh of man. In his house was a big hole which he covered with a carpet. He would invite somebody into his house and tell him to sit down on the chair over the hole. When the person sat down and fell into the hole, he would climb down by a ladder and eat him. In this way he ate all the people in his village one by one—about a hundred people. When he had eaten all the people in his village he returned to live in the forest, because there was nobody left to eat.

The cannibal motif appears in more subtle form in the parlor game known as *gabatā*, in which the aim is to accumulate as many pebbles as possible by moving them around a board with six holes on each side. In *gabatā* the active acquisition of pebbles is called "eating" and the passive acquisition is "drinking." Similarly, those who play chess or checkers refer to the process of taking a man as "eating" him. It is notable, moreover, that the Amhara version of the old riddle about how to transport a certain number of incompatible objects across the river in one boat is posed in terms of three human beings and three cannibals.

Oral sadism is further manifest among the Amhara by the nature of their speech. The Amhara are not only loquacious but also tend, both in manner of delivery and in content of conversation, to be biting and intrusive. Backbiting, insulting, arguing, and litigating are among their more characteristic modes of self-expression.

Backbiting and insulting, and the fear of being the victim of such activities, are the focus of much attention in Amhara culture. Concern about the former is expressed in a number of Amharic proverbs:

> If the mouth lacks work, it will backbite a friend.
>
> If you praise a man once, you will be in trouble if you backbite him later.
>
> If a man is a backbiter, listen for my sake when he talks to you.

Straightforward insults erupt the polite surface of Amhara social relations only under unusually heated circumstances, though it is customary for social superiors to direct a certain amount of abusive banter at their inferiors as

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155 gratifications are not enjoyed wholly without conflict. In actuality, traits which reflect anxiety about the prospect of oral gratification are no less conspicuous in Amhara culture than the phenomena we have just been discussing.

155 Negative attitudes regarding oral gratification appear, first of all, in the
262 scope and variety of the restrictions placed on eating. From both their Judaic and their Christian traditions the Abyssinians have taken over nearly every restriction on eating available. The chief exception to this is the Judaic injunction against eating blood, which Abyssinian custom permits. But they have retained intact the Semitic ban on unclean animals—those which lack a split hoof, upper teeth, or do not chew the cud. Their dread of pork is so strong that to some extent they feel closer to Muslims, who also avoid pork, than to Western Christians.

155 They have likewise retained and elaborated on the norms concerning fast-
785 ing found in early Christianity. With respect to the number and harshness of the fasts it prescribes, Amhara-Tigre custom is probably the strictest in the world. In the rigor of its fasting laws the Ethiopian Church surpasses its sister religions of Eastern Orthodoxy—the Coptic, Syrian, Armenian, and Indian Orthodox Churches. On fasting days no food or drink is to be tasted before early afternoon. Thereafter, no sort of meat, fowl, milk, or eggs may be eaten, which reduces the Amhara's post meridiem diet on fasting days to grains and pulse.

Such fasting days occur on every Wednesday and Friday of the year, except those which come during the eight weeks after Easter. There are, in addition, many special fasts in the course of the year. Some of these, like the month-long fast before Pentecost and the two months prior to Christmas, are observed only by clergy and elders. Others must be observed by everyone, though children are led into them gradually. These universal fasts include the eight weeks before Easter, plus a three-day fast during the week before Lent; two days before Christmas; and sixteen days preceding the festival of the Assumption of Mary in August. Total abstinence is prescribed for a period of forty-eight hours before Easter. All together, the ordinary Amhara is supposed to fast 165 days each year; for the devout person the total approaches 250 days.

155 The taboo on the use of tobacco presents another area in which oral grati-
276 fication is suppressed. Two myths are told to explain this taboo. One is that
• 773 the tobacco plant originally grew out of the intestines of the heretic Arius.
784 The other is that on the day of the Crucifixion all plants except tobacco withered and died. In any case, smoking is regarded as a grave sin among traditional Amhara, and one who has been suspected of using tobacco is not permitted to kiss the Cross.

121 One could argue that these taboos and fasting customs are simply cultural
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